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ABSTRACT

New freshmen living in dorms during the academic year 1971-72 were compared on several dimensions, depending on the type of dorm in which they lived, in three ways: (1) coed students vs. students in all male or all females dorms; (2) students in high-rise dorms vs. those in low-rise dorms; and (3) students in unlimited visitation hours dorms vs. those in dorms with limited visitation hours. They were compared on the following dimensions: (1) academic achievements; (2) attrition from the university; (3) University Student Census responses; (4) cost of physical damage to buildings; and (5) number of reported incidents such as theft, vandalism, and disturbances. No significant differences were found among residents in the different types of dorms on academic achievement or attrition. Some scattered differences were found on responses to the census. Coed and male dorms reported generally more building damage and incidents than female dorms. High-rise dorms generally reported more damages and incidents than low-rise dorms. Limited visitation hours dorms reported less incidents overall than unlimited visitation hours dorms, but reported higher damage costs than the unlimited hours dorms. This study suggests that type of housing is not a key element in the lives of most students. (Author)

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## SUMMARY

New freshmen living in dorms during the academic year 1971-72 were compared on several dimensions, depending on the type of dorm in which they lived, in three ways: 1) coed students vs. students in all male or all female dorms, 2) students in high rise dorms vs. those in low rise dorms, 3) students in unlimited visitation hours dorms vs. those in dorms with limited visitation hours. They were compared on the following dimensions: 1) academic achievement, 2) attrition from the university, 3) University Student Census responses, 4) cost of physical damage to buildings, and 5) number of reported incidents such as theft, vandalism, and disturbances. No significant differences were found among residents in the different types of dorms on academic achievement or attrition. Some scattered differences were found on responses to the Census. Coed and male dorms reported generally more building damages and incidents than female dorms. High rise dorms generally reported more damages and incidents than low rise dorms. Limited visitation hours dorms reported less incidents overall than unlimited visitation hours dorms, but reported higher damage costs than the unlimited hours dorms.

The writers feel that students, and all others, should have available a wide choice of living styles. However once this has been done, the burden of proof rests with those who contend that housing type somehow has a significant influence on students one way or the other. This study and others suggest that type of housing is not a key element in the lives of most students.

# A COMPARISON OF UNIVERSITY RESIDENCE HALLS

There have been many changes in university residence halls in recent years: more high rise dorms, apartment-style dorms, liberalization of closing hours and coeducational living units where men and women reside in the same hall. All these changes reflect a demand by students that their campus living be more realistic in terms of the environment outside the university community. But all these changes have caused concern from parents and administrators about the university maintaining its academic goals and atmosphere. Viewed from another perspective, the broad question may be posed; does it really make any difference what kinds of dorms we have?, or whether we have dorms at all? As accountability becomes a dominant theme on many campuses, such questions should be answered with data.

A limited amount of research has been done comparing different types of residence halls. Previous research in the area of coeducational dorms seems to conclude that residents of coed dorms are generally very satisfied with the living arrangements (Olson, 1964, Centra, 1968, Lynch, 1971). Eskow (1970) found that the coed setting had a minimal effect on grade point average (GPA). Lynch (1971) found that residents of coeducational dorms did not differ from occupants of non-coed dorms on such academic behavioral dimensions as time spent studying, outside books read, acquaintance with faculty members, and how studying time was spent. Centra (1968) concluded that students in coeducational living-learning units did not perceive their environment as being any more intellectual than did students in conventional single sex dorms.

Eskow (1970) also looked at the amount of physical damage done to buildings. He found a sharp increase in the amount of damage done to a dorm which had just changed from a single sex women's dorm to a coed residence. There was also

more damage done the first year to this coed dorm than to an all men's dorm in the same year. However, housing officials felt that the staff in the coed dorm tended to report all damages, while this was not necessarily the case in the single sex halls.

There hasn't been a great deal of research comparing different types of residential housing. One such study (Sommer, 1968) compared four types of halls: a) apartment units, b) small cluster units sharing a center courtyard, c) high rise dorms, and d) reconverted army barracks. Sommer used a questionnaire designed to measure reactions to the physical environment, social relationships and academic qualities of the halls. In terms of overall satisfaction, the smaller cluster halls were best liked. The high rise dorms were frequently described as "impersonal, institutional, and boxlike". Satisfaction in the high rise dorms seemed to depend somewhat on the personality characteristics of the occupants on a single floor. Students themselves identified some floors as "good study floors", while others were known for the frequent socializing that went on.

Studies that have concerned themselves with limited hours in dorm environments have been concerned with the effect on changing from enforced closing hours for women to unlimited hours; i.e. the effect of women being allowed to come and go whenever they wanted. This present study is concerned with visitation hours - hours when members of the opposite sex will be allowed to visit in the dorms. Although the issues involved differ as to what is being enforced, they are similar from the standpoint of asking if enforced regulations on student activities will have an effect on acadmeic environment and performance. It is interesting to note that two studies on the effect of changing closing hours policy found no significant differences. White and Rayder (1970) found students felt there was no significant change in study habits or academic climate in the dorm with the

more liberal policy. MacKay and Nelson (1970) used predicted grades (GPA) and achieved GPA to compare women subject to closing hours and those who were not. There was no significant difference between the two groups.

Despite the literature, doubts remain among many administrators and student personnel workers about the effects of residence halls on students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences that might exist between coed and single sex dorms, between high rise and low rise dorms, and between dorms with limited and unlimited visitation hours on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland. Low rise dorms are defined by the University housing office as those designed with four floors or less. Limited visitation hours dorms are those in which the occupants may establish by a 3/5 majority secret ballot vote to allow visitation by members of the opposite sex within the limits of certain hours established by the University. Unlimited visitation hours dorms are those in which residents may decide by 3/5 majority secret ballot vote to allow visitation beyond regular visitation hours. Students under 21 years of age must have parental permission to live in coed or unlimited visitation hours dorms.

These types of residence halls were compared on 1) academic achievement of the residents, 2) attitudes of the residents, 3) cost of reported repairs to the buildings, 4) number of reported incidents such as theft, vandalism, disturbances, etc., and 5) attrition from the University by the residents.

## METHOD

Subjects. The subjects were new freshmen students who entered the University during the fall semester, 1971, remained in school through the spring semester of that year, and who lived in residence halls. For the comparison of academic achievement, only those students with a record of high school rank and cumulative GPA for the two semesters were used. To compare attitude, only those students who had responded to the University Student Census (USC)[1] during summer orientation prior to beginning coursework in the fall were included.

Subjects included for the comparison of attrition from the University were new freshmen entering in the fall semester and living in dorms who did not again register at the College Park campus during spring, summer or fall, 1972, or spring, 1973.

Procedure and Analysis. The data outlined above were analyzed in three ways in order to maintain mutually exclusive categories of dorm types: 1) coed vs. single sex dorms, 2) high rise vs. low rise dorms, and 3) limited visitation hours vs. unlimited visitation hours dorms.

The data for the comparison of cumulative GPA were analyzed with analysis of covariance according to 2 levels of dorm type and sex. The criterion variable was GPA and high school rank was used as a covariate. In order to achieve approximately equal cell sizes, a random sample was drawn for each category of the dorm type and sex. This resulted in a total sample of 259 for the coed vs. single sex dorm analysis, 199 for the limited visitation vs. unlimited visitation hours dorm analysis, and 155 for the high rise vs. low rise analysis.

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1 The USC is a locally developed inventory available from the writers on request.

The USC consists of 2 types of items: multiple choice and Likert. Before analysis all stray and 'other' responses on the Likert items were converted to the 'neutral' category; any subject with more than 10% stray responses was not used. The Likert items were analyzed with analysis of variance (fixed effects: 2 levels of dorm and sex) and multiple choice items were analyzed by dorm type (2 levels) using chi square. Separate analyses were done for each dorm type and random sampling was done to attain approximately equal cell sizes in the analysis of variance.

The data for the cost of damages was obtained by totaling the amount charged for each type of dorm and dividing by the total population residing in that dorm type. These per capita figures were then analyzed with chi square.

The incident reports were first categorized in the following manner:

| CATEGORY | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|
| Personal Injury | intentional or accidental injury or sickness; burns; drug overdoses; severe illness; epileptic seizure |
| Public Disturbance-accidental | accidental tripping of fire alarm; disturbance caused with no indication of intent |
| Public Disturbance-intentional | fights, noisy unruly behavior, bomb threats, intentional false fire alarms, unidentified individual in dorm, peeping tom |
| Rule Infractions | disobeying dorm rules without causing a disturbance: exiting through incorrect door, violation of visitation hours |
| Damage, accidental | accidental fire from poor wiring or cooking; pipes leaking causing damge |
| Vandalism | property damage seeming to be intentional without theft; arson |
| Theft | stolen property |

The reported incidents were totaled for each type of dorm and analyzed with chi square. The attrition data were classified in a similar manner: the number of students who entered in the fall, but didn't return was tallied for each dorm type and analyzed with chi square.

## RESULTS

### Coed vs. single sex dorms

No significant difference was found comparing students of coed and single sex dorms on cumulative GPA according to dorm type and sex (Table 1). Neither was there any significant difference between the dorm types (coed, male dorms, and female dorms) when comparing the number of students who dropped out of the University (Table 2).

An analysis of the USC showed responses to only 3 of 45 questions differed significantly ($p < .05$) according to dorm type. In response to the question "I feel a part of the student body" the single sex dorm students tended to agree more strongly than students of coed dorms. The students were asked what kind of learning experience they preferred. Both groups preferred small group study most frequently (26% coed, 32% single sex), coed dorm students preferred a seminar more frequently (15% coed, 6% single sex), while the single sex dorm students preferred large group lectures once a week combined with small group sessions with teaching assistants (10% coed, 20% single sex). The students were asked to choose from a list of alternatives, which contributed most to their own development during the past year. Both groups felt friendships made had influenced them (25% coed, 23% single sex), while coed students chose work with social or political action groups more frequently than single sex dorm students (11% coed, 2% single sex).

Significant differences were found between the dorms on the number of incidents reported and costs of repairs ($p < .05$ - see Tables 3 and 4). Coed dorms reported more intentional public disturbances and rule infractions than single sex male or female dorms, but less incidents of theft. Female single sex dorms reported less vandalism, rule infractions, accidental damages, than the other dorms, but an equal rate of theft as the male single sex dorms.

The cost of repairs to building in per capita rates were: 94¢ for coed dorms, 90¢ for male dorms, and 40¢ for female dorms.

High rise vs. low rise dorms

No significant difference was found between high rise and low rise dorm residents on cumulative GPA. Nor was there a significant difference between these dorm types on the number of students leaving school.

Two questions on the USC were significant beyond .05. High rise dorms more strongly agree that students should be suspended who disrupt normal operations of the University. Low rise dorm residents were more interested in seeing direct bus service from downtown Baltimore to the campus.

There were significant differences ($p < .05$) between the two dorm types on frequency of incidents reported and damage costs reported. High rise dorms reported more thefts, accidental damages, and rule infractions. Low rise dorms reported more injuries and accidental public disturbances. High rise dorms averaged $1.08 per person for damage costs reported as compared to 28¢ for low rise dorms.

Limited visitation hours vs. unlimited visitation hours dorms

No significant differences on GPA were found between dorm residents according to sex and type of visitation hours. Neither was there a significant difference between them on the number dropping out of the University.

Five questions on the USC showed significant differences between the two groups. Students in limited hours dorms tended to agree more that: 1) "programs should be set up by which supervised community service would earn academic credit", 2) that "divisional or college libraries are preferrable to a general library on campus", and 3) that "it is desirable to allow faculty to specialize in teaching, research, or service, to the exclusion of others." The students were asked "What do you feel is the best way for the state of Maryland to provide higher education for blacks and whites?". Students in limited visitation hours dorms felt more strongly that it was best to improve the quality of the predominantly black colleges (lim. hrs. 29%, unlim. hrs. 22%). Students in unlimited hours dorms responded more often with "other" (41%) compared to limited hours students (23%). Both groups ranked small group study as the most desirable learning experience. Limited hours students preferred seminars more than unlimited hours students (lim. hrs. 15%, unlim. hrs. 3%).

Limited visitation hours dorms had fewer reported incidents overall than unlimited hours dorms. However, the per capita cost of reported damages to the dorms was $1.02 for limited visitation hours dorms and 54¢ for unlimited visitation hours dorms.

## DISCUSSION

This study tried to assess measurable differences that may exist in different types of dorms on the University of Maryland, College Park campus in an attempt to understand types of students who would choose each type of dorm, and how a particular type of dorm might effect the social and academic environment of the students. Except for cost of physical damages to the buildings and the number of reported incidents that occurred, the

results of the study reveal no clear differences between dorms and their residents. These two significant areas of difference should be qualified with the understanding that both financial costs and number of incidents depended on the efficiency of the dorm staff reporting them, age and condition of the buildings, etc.

In an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education (April 2, 1973), Edward R. Weidlein noted that although enrollment in colleges is increasing, many beds in college residence halls are not being filled. Students seem to be preferring to live off campus more now than in the past.

The results of this study give no clear indication of why students seem to be somewhat less interested in University housing. The types of dorm environments studied do not seem to be really different in the sense that no more students leave one type of dorm than another, nor do students in one type of dorm significantly excel in academic performance.

It could be that the wrong questions and variables were investigated in the study. Perhaps studies dealing more directly with student likes and dislikes about the dorm would yield more differential results. But considering this study and the others done comparing types of housing the writers feel there may have been overconcern in many quarters about the relevance and influence of housing in a student's environment.

University administrators, parents and the general public have cast a dubious eye toward unlimited visitation and coed housing. Housing staff have grown increasingly concerned about their role in providing stimulating environments that go beyond the traditional opportunities available on a campus. The writers feel that none of these groups should worry since the students likely take their environment with them. They create their own environments. Thus the different types of dorms attract about the same kinds of students with about the same general initial attitudes and

about the same things happen to them academically.

The writers feel that students, and all others, should have available a wide choice of living styles. However once this has been done, the burden of proof rests with those who contend that housing type somehow has a significant influence on students one way or the other. This study and others suggest that type of housing is not a key element in the lives of most students.

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Table 1

Analysis of Covariance on Cumulative GPA*

Coed vs. Single Sex

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | 1.680 | 1 | 1.680 | 3.211 | .074 |
| Dorm Type | .005 | 1 | .005 | .010 | .919 |
| Sex X Dorm | .039 | 1 | .039 | .074 | .786 |
| Within groups | 132.936 | 254 | .523 | | |

High Rise vs. Low Rise

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | .753 | 1 | .753 | 1.470 | .227 |
| Dorm Type | .005 | 1 | .005 | .010 | .920 |
| Sex X Dorm | 1.587 | 1 | 1.587 | 3.098 | .080 |
| Within groups | 76.815 | 150 | .512 | | |

Limited Hours vs. Unlimited Visitation Hours

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | 2.001 | 1 | 2.001 | 3.653 | .057 |
| Dorm Type | .090 | 1 | .090 | .163 | .687 |
| Sex X Dorm | 2.116 | 1 | 2.116 | 3.862 | .051 |
| Within groups | 106.282 | 194 | .548 | | |

* High school grades used as a covariate

Table 2

Attrition - Frequencies of Students Not Returning to the University after Fall Semester*

| Coed | Male | Female | High Rise | Low Rise | Limited Hours | Unlimited Hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 52 | 67 | 52 | 90 | 81 | 85 | 86 |

*Differences not significant beyond .05 level using chi square.

Table 3

Reported Incidents*

| | Personal Injury | Accidental Pub. Dist. | Intentional Pub. Dist. | Rule Infraction | Accidental Damage | Vandalism | Theft |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coed | 14 | 7 | 50 | 28 | 17 | 34 | 49 |
| Male | 9 | 21 | 31 | 14 | 11 | 38 | 69 |
| Female | 12 | 6 | 28 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 69 |
| High Rise | 15 | 12 | 55 | 35 | 20 | 39 | 95 |
| Low Rise | 20 | 22 | 54 | 9 | 14 | 37 | 92 |
| Unlim. Hrs. | 22 | 25 | 77 | 28 | 29 | 50 | 97 |
| Lim. Hrs. | 13 | 9 | 32 | 16 | 15 | 26 | 90 |

*Differences significant beyond .05 level using chi square.

Table 4

Cost of Physical Repairs to Buildings (per capita)*

| Coed | Male | Female | High Rise | Low Rise | Limited Hours | Unlimited Hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $.94 | $.90 | $.40 | $1.08 | $.28 | $1.02 | $.54 |

*Differences significant beyond .05 level using chi square.